

Railfuture Northeast

BRANCH BULLETIN – FEBRUARY 2014

1 Branch AGM – Saturday 1st March 2014 starting 2pm

Do try and get to the Branch's AGM at the Newcastle Art Centre in Westgate Road. Details are on the attached advert.

Guest speaker Simon Walton of the Campaign for Borders Rail will address us about the on-going reconstruction of over thirty miles of railway from near Edinburgh to Tweedmouth. Then follows the business part of the meeting – reports, accounts and elections. Plus a special 'soundings' slot when views will be sought about the Branch's programme for 2014. Tea and coffee will be available.

2 Branch Officers

Chairman Trevor Watson, Vice-Chairman Keith Simpson, Secretary Ian Walker, Treasurer Gordon Barclay and *Railwatch* correspondent Peter Kenyon are all willing to be proposed for nomination again.

Exception is Press Officer Tony Walker who has decided to stand down. Damian Bell is willing to be nominated. ***BUT other nominations for any of the Branch posts are welcome and can be submitted right up to the beginning of the meeting. Seconders are required for all nominations.***

3 Branch Committee

Role of the Branch Committee is to advise about general strategy, to help design the Branch's programme of meetings and to monitor what is happening to the railway in the North East. Meetings are bi-monthly and usually held in Durham.

The Committee currently comprises all six of the Branch officers plus five others. The Chair would be pleased to welcome additional members.

4 The Chairman's Report

Here is Trevor Watson's report for 2013.

The highlight for the Branch in 2013 was the preparation for and hosting of the Railfuture national AGM in Durham town hall on Saturday 11th May.

The committee worked tirelessly to make this event the success it was. Favourable comments were made about the venue and the organisation.

MEP Fiona Hall opened it setting the North East scene in her remarks. The three morning speakers kept the audience of one hundred people informed and entertained with their respective topics.

Alex Nelson of Chester-le-Track told everyone about his enterprise, some local history and ticketing anomalies.

Andy Rogers of Hitachi described the next generation of Inter City passenger trains to be built at a new factory in Newton Aycliffe.

Dennis Fancett gave an upbeat presentation on the campaign to restore passenger services to Ashington and south east Northumberland, some 49 years (and counting) since they were axed by Beeching.

We had hoped to inject some youthfulness into the AGM, by inviting sixth-form pupils from local schools but there was no interest from those schools asked. It may have been an exam clash issue.

If we are going to survive as an organisation we need to recruit younger members. With this in mind, I attended a rail networking day at Newcastle University in July. This was a presentation of rail related projects that European students had been working on in their groups whilst spending three weeks at summer school at the university.

Three Branch meetings were held at Newcastle for our members and these were better attended than last year. We were given an update on east coast matters by Neal Smith particularly work to be carried out at Newcastle central station.

Train Leasing was a subject enthusiastically covered by Tim Burliegh of Eversholt Rail.

Chris Nutton of First TransPennine Express brought us up to date with the company's plans for improved service provision.

This year the Branch committee met five times at Durham. Some committee members, including myself, attended the following events:-

1. Passenger Focus meeting Newcastle.
2. 50 years on from Beeching, York NRM.
3. Tyne & Wear Freight Partnership meetings at Newcastle and Sunderland Civic Centres.

4. Port of Tyne visit with CILT
5. Naming Ceremony of East Coast Class 91 “Durham Cathedral” at Newcastle, followed by a visit to the great gathering of A4’s at York NRM.
6. Rail networking day Newcastle University.
7. SENRUG AGM Morpeth
8. HS2 workshop Newcastle University.
9. Meeting with New Rail, Newcastle University.
10. The future of the ECML, Newcastle Civic Centre.

A few improvements have been made during the year in our region. Since December’s timetable change Northern Trains have more calls at Dunston and Blaydon stations However Blaydon calls need to be improved to at least hourly instead of two hourly (off peak) in my opinion.

Hexham station has had the platform canopies and footbridge renovated. Several North East design footbridges on the Newcastle-Carlisle line have also been renovated.

The subway improvements at Morpeth station have been completed and a wind break erected on the southbound platform. Northumberland County Council has provided an additional 70 space car park here.

The Newcastle Central travel centre has been relocated and the former glass and steel edifice is currently being removed. Work continues on the portico and when finished will result in a much better arrival experience to the city centre.

As a result of rolling stock cascade TransPennine Express will, from May 2014, be providing two services an hour from Newcastle to Liverpool via Manchester Victoria, one of which will be a fast limited stop service. They have also invested in a train crew depot at Gunner House Newcastle.

Northern’s ancient rolling stock has been given an interior make over; let’s hope for a replacement for the unloved Pacer units in the next franchise.

Tyne & Wear Metro have renewed track and drainage between Jesmond and South Gosforth in a summer blockade. The recent reliability of the service has been below par resulting in a fine of £500,000 for the operator DB Regio.

The Bidders have been announced for the East Coast franchise and it would be good to have dialogue with them.

Trevor Watson – Branch Chairman

5 Reaching out to younger age groups

As noted in the Chairman's report above, Railfuture, like many other voluntary organisations, has an age profile top heavy at the 60+ end. The Committee, therefore, has decided to make a conscious effort to try and forge links with younger people. We've taken two specific steps: (i) we have negotiated a special type of entry into Railfuture for those either of secondary school age or who are members of local Rail User Groups and would like to be involved with Railfuture North East. Known as the "supporter" route those joining enjoy a reduced membership fee: receive the national *Railwatch* publication: and can attend our Branch meetings, though they do not have voting rights or access to special cheap rates for conferences. So far two people have taken advantage of this new facility.

And (ii) we have established contact with the New Rail Department at Newcastle University. New Rail nurtures undergraduate and post-graduate study projects concerned with both passenger and freight, it mounts specialist courses for rail professionals and non-professionals and it seeks to raise awareness of career opportunities in the rail industry among school and university students.

Already three members of the Committee have assisted as judges and mentors at a special event at the University attended by over one hundred school students. In addition Committee members have offered to meet with six undergraduates preparing papers on railway topics including high speed, train delays and the development of new systems of handling passenger baggage. We will aim to make the activities of the Branch known to New Rail students. Our hope is that in time some of the students will play a part in Railfuture.

6 The future 'governance' of the railway in North East England

If only we knew! It looks as though the next East Coast Franchise will involve the winner inheriting the existing East Coast Trains Company and routes, with just an **outside** chance that the local services in the North East could be wrapped up in that same franchise.

We think the existing TransPennine and Northern Franchises will remain separate but be run on some sort of partnership basis with the Local Authorities across the North of England. And provided the local North East services do **not** go in with the East Coast franchise then they too will be part of the partnership arrangement.

7 In conclusion.....

Reopening of Leamside, Pendalinos on the ECML, new stations at Horden and Gilsland, SLUG, Coastliners RUG, Weardale decline, developments at Aln Valley, the railway as an economic generator in the region, fares, electrification, Grand Central, increased passenger numbers.....these and other rail related topics have exercised the Branch in some form or other this past year. It would be an understatement to say that the contemporary world of the railway is challenging!

Tony Walker

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www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk www.railwatch.org.uk

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